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ABSTRACT

The process of contextualization of theological education through an internship experience at Perkins School of Theology is described. Perkins is a graduate professional school of theology preparing persons for leadership in the church, and the internship normally follows the second year of academic study. The intern is placed in a teaching congregation that accepts the student's learning as a high priority of its ministry, and the field instructor is the pastor or other competent professional person who is the immediate supervisor for the intern. The intern is required to prepare weekly verbatims or reflection papers on her/his own acts of ministry, and theological reflection is a critical part of this process. An intern committee consisting of from six to eight lay persons of mature faith participate in the negotiation of the learning covenant and share regularly, individually, and as a committee with the intern for support, feedback, and evaluation. Other components of the internship program are as follows: a consultant, who may be a mental health or social service professional, trains field instructors in supervision and facilitates the personal growth of the interns; the district superintendent in the United Methodist Church and the bishop provide supportive roles; the faculty for the internship program consists of five full-time persons; and evaluation/feedback is of vital importance throughout the internship. It is suggested that the internship is a contextual appropriation and execution of all that makes up ministry, including the academic knowledge. (SW)

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Perkins School of Theology has one of the most impressive internship programs in all theological education. Claus Rohlfs, a former vice president of the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, is the director of the program and a member of the faculty at Perkins. He has brought together in Perkins's program a pastor's sensitivity to the way in which learning takes place in the local church and a theological school professor's concern for careful research and theological reflection. Because so many lay persons and pastors are interested in this phase of theological education, the board is pleased to present a thoughtful resume of the Perkins program written by Professor Rohlfs for your interest. As is always the case in publications in the Occasional Papers, the staff and the author will be pleased to have your commentary and critique of this paper.

F. Thomas Trotter

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CONTEXTUAL EDUCATION: INTERNSHIP

by Claus H. Rohlfs

Contextual education: Is it field work or field education? Is it concurrent with academic studies or full-time involvement? Is it for broadening one's general understanding or for professionalization? Is it to learn skills or to integrate all one's prior knowledge and experience? Is it to become acquainted with the "job" or to become aware of one's own personhood--conscious and unconscious--as it impinges on doing ministry? Is it anti-intellectual or the vital laboratory for the appropriation of the academic attainment? Any number of answers are possible, depending on who answers the questions. I would like to share with you the process of contextualization of theological education, now in its ninth year at Perkins School of Theology.

Efforts at quality concurrent field education at Perkins met with only nominal results in the sixties. The curriculum developed in the 1968-69 academic year (and still more or less operational) reflected the following basic field education decisions on the part of faculty, administration, and student representatives:

1. The purpose of Perkins is to be a graduate professional school of

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theology preparing persons for leadership in the church.
2. Field education would be a full-time internship.

The Perkins Intern Program, the result of extensive consultation over a period of two years, had its first students in 1971-72. It is not a static and rigid program, but a dynamic and flexible process constantly in flux and change within the basic design. Although the minimum degree requirement for the length of the internship is one semester, 70 percent of our students opt for either two semesters or twelve months.

There are many types of internships in the professional world. It seems to me that there are only a certain number of possible components to any internship. The quality of a given internship depends on how the pieces are put together, the expectations for excellence on the part of all participants, as well as adequate training, supervision, and evaluation of and by all participants.

The Perkins internship normally follows the second year of academic study. The internship seeks to prepare persons for professional leadership in the church as it now exists. It is our hope that persons who are effective leaders will have opportunity to participate in the ongoing renewal and reform of the church.

The internship puts flesh and blood to the doctrine of the church, which understands the church to be:

1. the people of God, both laity and clergy;
2. a covenanting community to celebrate the good news of God in Jesus Christ through Word, sacrament, and order;
3. for the healing of persons and society;
4. in mission to the world.

Though the clergy are "professional," they differ from other professionals. Clergy always remain with laity pilgrims and amateurs before God. Laity, by virtue of the "ordination" of baptism, are God's messengers and ambassadors in the world in which they experience and live out their lives.

Professional clergy share the life of faith in the congregation and are "called" of God in faith, commitment, and mission. We are struggling with our "woundedness" and the appropriation of God's grace. Aware of our "humanity," Christians must be experiencing the healing of anger, estrangement, fear, resentment, etc. Clergy must interpret these instances of pain into instances of redemption for the whole community of faith. It is expected that clergy persons be adequate in those skills requisite to the performance of competent ministry. For the pastor this means, among other things, competence in worship, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, counseling, management, evangelism, church education, teacher recruitment, and training.

The clergy person should be able to relate reasonably effectively to children, youth, and persons of various stages of adulthood. This means caring for and suffering with persons of all ages in whatever stages of faith they may be.

Academic theology must become incarnational and experiential in the stress

and strain of doing professional ministry. A clergy person has the academic knowledge of Bible, theology, and history for the upbuilding of the church and the salvation of the world.

In my judgment no person can serve as pastor relying solely on his/her own resources. The pastor is interdependent with other clergy, with the laity, and with other professionals in helping ministries. There is no place for the loner in ministry.

The internship is for us not simply a process of practicing skills, learning polity and systems, and gaining confidence in running a program. It is, in fact, the contextual appropriation and execution of all that makes up ministry, including the academic knowledge. It means testing, reflecting, learning. It means hurting, being shaken up, sometimes crying. It means celebrating, rejoicing, being fulfilled, enabling, loving--JOY.

To attempt to achieve these goals, the Perkins Intern Program is a process involving consultants, field instructors, laity, interns, judicatory executives and bishops, and intern faculty. It is in the interaction of all these persons with interns in ministry that personal and professional growth and maturation may take place. For such growth there is no script. No two students (nor placements) are alike. We of the intern faculty share the pain and the joy of participating in this exciting birthing and growing process.

Let me briefly identify the various persons and aspects involved:

1. The intern is a student who has completed a minimum of 50 percent of the M.Th.(M.Div.) degree program.

2. The intern is placed in a teaching congregation which accepts the student's learning as a high priority of its ministry.

3. The intern spouse is not officially involved. However, spouses are urged to participate in the placement process. During internship, spouses may meet with the field unit consultant to secure help with their own needs as the spouses of persons preparing for ministry.

4. The field instructor (F.I.) is the pastor or other competent professional person who has immediate supervisory authority for the intern. New field instructors are required to participate in a three-day Field Instructor's Institute on campus. All field instructors participate in monthly supervisory seminars with the consultant and their peers. The field instructor is expected to provide a weekly one to one-and-one-half hour supervisory conference for the student. The intern is required to prepare weekly verbatims or reflection papers on her/his own act of ministry. Theological reflection is a critical part of this process.

5. The intern committee consists of from six to eight lay persons of mature faith. They participate in the negotiation of the learning covenant and share regularly, individually and as a committee with the intern for support, feedback, and evaluation. There are more

than six hundred persons of all walks of life in our program this year. They express caring love even to the point of pain and conflict. There is no way to overstate the critical role and function of these lay persons in the maturation and formation of the interns for ordained ministry, as well as developing their own ministry as Christian persons.

6. The field unit consists normally of from three to six students who are in geographical proximity.

7. The consultant, who may be a psychiatrist, pyschologist, social worker, or CPE supervisor, has two major functions: to train and enable field instructors in supervision and to facilitate the personal growth of the interns. Interns meet seven times per semester for two hours in peer groups with the consultant. An intern with serious relational problems is referred for therapy or other options open to her/him for healing.

8. The judicatory representative (district superintendent in the United Methodist Church) is invited to relate to the intern in his/her district, and to share and interpret the work and mission of the church as she/he sees it.

9. The bishop, in addition to being concerned to replace with competent successors field instructors who moved, meets in December or January with the interns for a two- to three-hour seminar. This provides the intern and the bishop opportunity to know each other and to share concerns and dreams.

10. Evaluation/feedback is a very important aspect of the intern program. It begins with the internship and is vitally important throughout. Evaluation/feedback has as its primary purpose to provide the intern with feedback through the field instructor, peers, consultant, laity, and intern faculty on how she/he is being perceived, both as a person and in doing ministry. Only I know how I feel and what I see. Only you know how you perceive me. If you don't care enough about me to share your perception of me, I shall be denied valuable data and frequently be condemned by my mis-self-perception. At the end of the first and second semesters, formal evaluation conferences are held, involving the consultant, field instructor, laity, intern, and intern faculty member. We have developed an instrument which assists us in gathering insights on observed behaviors from those who work closely with the intern. This data is collated through the use of a computer. All participants in the evaluation conference are provided with a printout.

11. The intern faculty at Perkins consists of five full-time persons. At one time or another members of the intern faculty meet personally with almost every student in the M.Th. program during the year. The critical tasks involve:
    - negotiating the intern placement. This may call for numerous conferences to assist the student in focusing on career goals before the placement process can ever begin. Every student (and spouse) makes a preplacement visit in the prospective

placement. If all goes well, the placement is confirmed;
- developing placements, training committees in the parish, and participating in the basic Field Instructors' Institute of three days for all new field instructors;
- organizing and coordinating field units;
- recruiting and orienting consultants;
- making mid-semester visits of five to seven hours in each placement;
- being available in the event of conflict or crisis; conducting evaluations;
- continuing to supervise students who do not complete the internship satisfactorily.

The blending of these eleven persons, groups, and aspects is what I mean by the contextualization of theological education.

The internship provides a testing of one's career commitment and an opportunity to mature as well as to integrate one's personal, spiritual, academic, and functional skills into a wholeness which may provide an adequate basis on which to begin the professional ministry.

On return from internship the faculty has the privilege and challenge of assisting the student in discovering advanced knowledge in relation to which the whole person to that point in time may continue to develop for the high calling of Jesus Christ--to be a minister of the gospel.

On completion of his/her degree program, the student leaves the school--not complete for ministry for life--but rather able to participate in the lives of persons within the congregation as pilgrims and witnesses, as seekers and guides on life's journey, aware of their human limitations and learning to trust increasingly the grace of God. So may we all see that which is not obvious--that reality of God which transforms and redeems persons and societies in our time.